

Burnt Hill Recreational Trail Plan

DRAFT: Development in progress

10/04/05

Part I: Background

Purpose of Project

Burnt Hill is managed by DNR's Olympic Region and is located in the northwest portion of Washington State. Recreation and public access in the forest is managed through the Olympic Region in conjunction with the DNR's Recreation Program based in Olympia.

Recreation on DNR lands in the Olympic Region is generally guided under the Olympic Region Recreation Inventory and Assessment, 2005 (Olympic Region RIA). However, DNR recognized growing pressures and concerns regarding recreation use on Burnt Hill for which the resolution was beyond the scope of the Olympic Region RIA. Developing the Burnt Hill Recreational Trail Plan is a clear priority for DNR.

The grant application described the project as follows:

“This ORV trail planning project will help determine ORV access routes, identify carrying capacity, and locate placement for needed trailhead facilities within Burnt Hill.⁵ Other outcomes of the planning project will be layout and design of proposed trailheads, State Environmental Policy Act preparation, location and design of new trail connectors, and identification of existing trails to be renovated or relocated.⁶ The DNR has recently completed a detailed inventory of all the trails in Burnt Hill.⁷ This valuable information will be an important part of this trail planning project and will provide base information for meaningful decision making.”

The Burnt Hill block contains 5,100 acres of DNR-managed state trust forestland (see map below). The forestland is managed for revenue production. Consistent with state law, DNR allows compatible recreation use of state trust lands. Offering recreation opportunities on Burnt Hill is consistent with DNR's authority to construct, operate and maintain primitive outdoor recreation facilities under Chapter 79.10.140 RCW.

⁵ Though not grant-funded, non-motorized planning is being done concurrent with motorized planning.

⁶ Site design is not a direct outcome of this planning project, but future design work will be based on this plan.

⁷ The trail inventory was completed in 2001.

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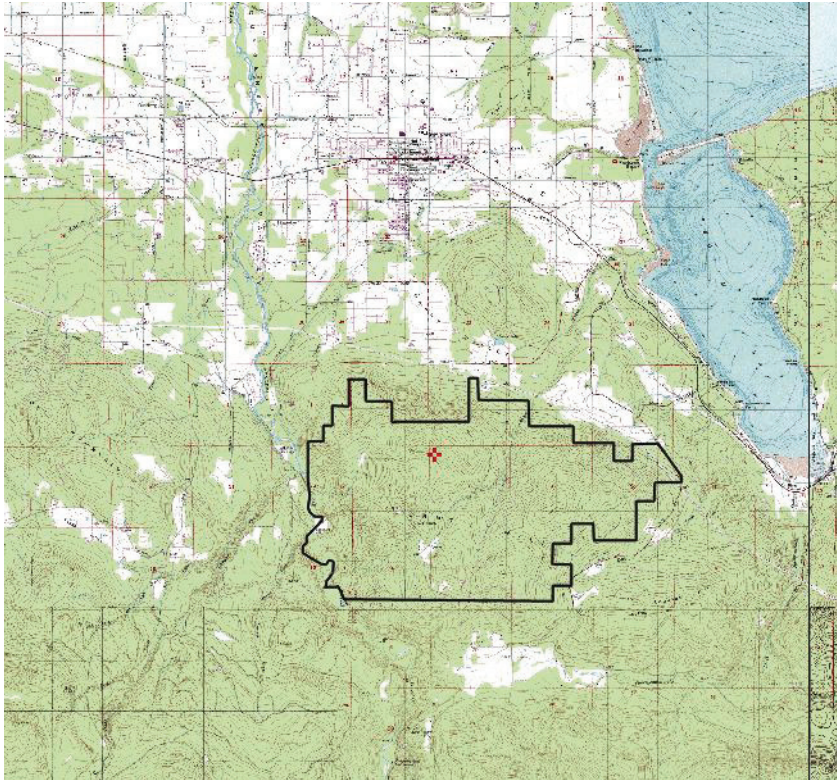


Figure 2. Burnt Hill. (<http://www.topozone.com/map.asp?lat=48.07972&lon=-123.10056>)

Current recreation on Burnt Hill includes motorized and non-motorized uses on roads and user-built trails. However, recreation on Burnt Hill has not been designated and managed, and DNR's trust assets and natural resources are being damaged.

Outside of the realm of recreation, there are illegal activities that impact Burnt Hill, such as garbage dumping and vandalism, as well as increasing complaints from neighboring landowners about these and other issues.

As a part of the context of the Burnt Hill planning area, there are about 520 acres of private forestland within and adjacent to the DNR land. This private forestland is subject to development pressures. In addition to the expanding urban lands, rural lands and federal forestland border the planning area.

The purpose of this project, the Burnt Hill Recreational Trail Plan, is to develop a plan for Burnt Hill focused on managing existing recreation but, to the extent possible, it will also address illegal activities.

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Inventory and Assessment

Service Area

The intended service area for Burnt Hill is from Port Townsend to Port Angeles, including Port Hadlock, Sequim and surrounding areas (see map below). This has been defined as the intended service area because it is the approximate area from which the majority of current visitors originate.

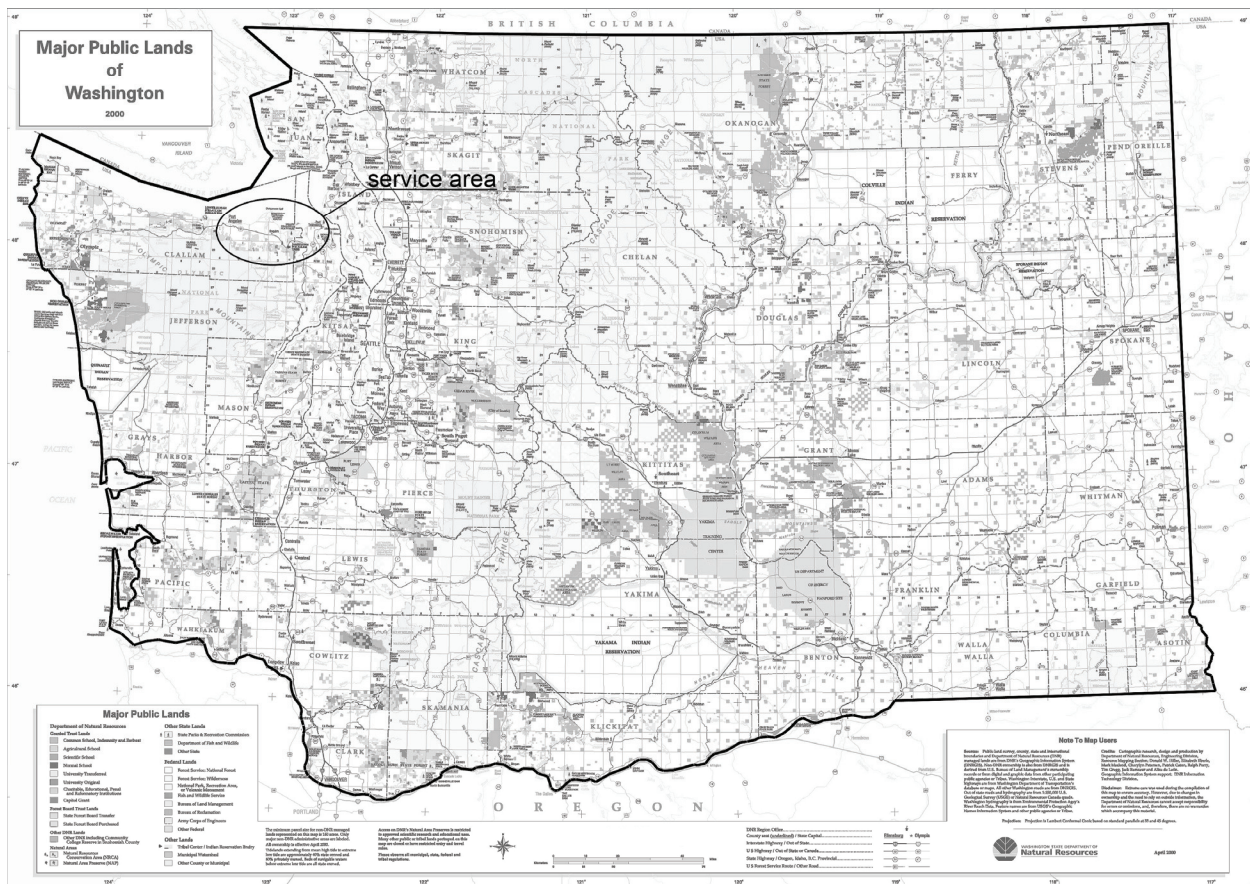


Figure 3. Burnt Hill service area.

Facilities and Opportunities Available (Supply)

Within the service area there are a variety of general outdoor recreation facilities. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

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Recreation Facilities in the Service Area		
Ownership	Name	Major Activities
<i>Washington State Parks</i>	Anderson Lake Fort Flagler Fort Worden Sequim Bay	Hiking, fishing, boating Hiking, camping, boating Hiking, camping, fishing, boating Hiking, camping, fishing, boating
<i>Washington State Dept. of Fish and Wildlife</i>	Port Townsend City Dock Dungeness Hatchery Elwha Rearing Channel	City managed fishing pier Fishing, fish viewing Fish viewing
<i>USDA, Forest Service</i>	Dungeness Forks Campground East Crossing Campground	Camping, fishing Camping, fishing
<i>Olympic National Park</i>	Olympic National Park Visitor Center Heart O' The Hills Campground Elwha Campground Altair Campground at Elwha Madison Falls Trail at Elwha Whiskey Trails Bend at Elwha Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center Deer Park Campground Blue Mountain Overlook	Hiking, photography, interpretation Hiking, camping, photography Hiking, camping, photography Hiking, camping, fishing, photography Hiking, wildlife viewing, photography Hiking, wildlife viewing, photography Hiking, wildlife viewing, photography Hiking, camping, photography
<i>Clallam County Parks</i>	Panorama Vista Port Williams Wheeler River Park Dungeness Recreation Area Cline Spit Community Beach Robin Hill Farm Freshwater Bay Salt Creek Recreation Area	Hiking, fishing Hiking, boating Hiking, fishing Hiking, camping, horse riding, hunting Hiking, fishing, boating Hiking, horse riding, bicycle access Hiking, fishing, boating, bird watching Hiking, camping, fields, nature viewing
<i>Jefferson County Parks</i>	Jefferson County Fairgrounds North Beach Recreation Center in Port Townsend County Courthouse Park	Camping, picnics, sports Picnics, waterfront Picnics, sports, playgrounds Picnics, sports

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Recreation Facilities in the Service Area		
<i>Ownership</i>	Name	Major Activities
	Larry Scott Memorial Trail	Hiking, picnics, waterfront
	Irondale Park	Picnics, sports, playgrounds
	Chimacum Park	Camping, picnics
	H.J. Carroll Park	Hiking, picnics, waterfront, playgrounds
	South Indian Islands Park	Hiking, picnics, waterfront
	Oak Bay Park	Camping, waterfront, playgrounds
	East Beach Park	Waterfront
	Beausite Lake / NW Kiwanis Camp	Camping, waterfront
	Gibbs Lake Park	Hiking, picnics, waterfront
	Lake Leland	Camping, picnics, waterfront

Table 1. Recreation in the service area. Sources include Washington State Accessible Outdoor Recreation Guide (<http://www.parks.wa.gov/ada-rec/detail.asp?region=CO>), Clallam County Parks (http://www.clallam.net/CountyParks/html/parks_map.htm) and Jefferson County Parks (<http://www.jcparksandrec.org/facilities/index.html>).

From the variety of recreation opportunities available, it appears that certain recreation needs, such as hiking and sightseeing, are well addressed. Other uses, such as off-road vehicle use and mountain biking, are not well addressed.

In addition to the facilities offered by other providers, DNR has a variety of lands in the service area that support recreation use, including the following:

DNR Designated Trail Facilities in the Service Area	
Name	Major Activities
Foothills Trail	ORV, Mountain biking, Horse riding, Hiking
Sadie Creek Trail	ORV, Mountain biking, Horse riding
Little River Trail	Hiking
Striped Peak	Mountain Biking, Horse riding, Hiking
Murdock Beach	Hiking, Camping

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DNR Designated Trail Facilities in the Service Area	
Name	Major Activities
Sadie Creek 4x4	ORV (4x4 in specific)
Burnt Hill ⁸	ORV, Mountain biking, Horse riding, Hiking

Table 2. DNR recreation in the service area.

By looking at the kinds of uses allowed on other recreation facilities compared to the kinds of uses allowed and occurring on DNR lands, it is clear that recreation facilities on DNR lands in this service area are filling niches that other recreation facilities do not.

Demonstrated Need (Demand)

Providing designated and managed recreation opportunities on DNR lands is an important part of meeting the demand of residents in this service area for outdoor recreation activities such as ORV use. There are many general recreation opportunities available to those interested in activities like hiking and wildlife viewing, but there are very few opportunities available to those interested in mountain biking and ORV riding. In this service area, DNR lands may well represent the only opportunities for these activities.

The fact that all the trails on Burnt Hill at this point in time are user-built and have been being used for years is one strong demonstration of constant demand. Because of impacts to DNR's natural resources, as well as neighbor concerns, it is time for this recreation to come under DNR management.

Adopting a recreation plan meets the requirements of state law (Chapter 79.10.120 RCW), while it also helps to gain the support of recreation visitors in maintaining the area. This support will also lend itself to gaining potential grant funding, which helps with the staffing of education and enforcement personnel. Adopting a recreation plan offers the best opportunity for DNR to meet its land management obligations while achieving multiple use objectives.

⁸ The purpose of this plan is to designate a sustainable trail system on Burnt Hill.

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Existing Environment

Burnt Hill is in the lower foothills of the Olympic Mountains south of the city of Sequim, east of the Dungeness River and south and west of the head of Sequim Bay. Elevation ranges from 800 feet to approximately 2400 feet. Burnt Hill is composed of two knobs separated by a topographic saddle. There are eight different soil types in the Burnt Hill planning area. Currently, most of the soil types are stable. The two identified as unstable are located on steep slopes that do not have existing trails or any proposed trails.

The project planning area is located in the following three Watershed Assessment Units: Dungeness Valley, Bell Creek and Sequim Valley. There are numerous small streams that flow from the Burnt Hill landscape. Several unnamed streams flow west into the Dungeness River, and subsequently into the Dungeness Bay. To the south and east sides of the hill streams flow into Dean Creek and then into Sequim Bay near the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe's land. The Johnson Creek headwaters to the north has several tributaries that flow into Sequim Bay at the John Wayne Marina. There are seven wetlands in the vicinity. Only four of these wetlands are currently accessible by trail. Protection of these wetlands was addressed in the planning process through the closure of trails and restoration of the wetlands that had been impacted in the past. New trails will not be routed in the vicinity of any of the wetlands.

The plant communities consist of mixed communities of deciduous and conifer trees and their associated undergrowth vegetation. Tree species within the planning area include Douglas Fir, Western Hemlock, Grand Fir, Red Cedar, Big Leaf Maple, Red Alder, and Madrona. Their associate undergrowth includes Huckleberry, Salal, Oregon Grape, Ocean Spray and Pacific Rhododendron. Several wild fires, some of which may have originated in the Sequim prairie, have burned through this area in a regular cycle through time. In addition to early logging, this fire activity has left only scattered remnants of old growth trees.

The Burnt Hill area provides habitat for a diversity of mammal and bird species associated with mountain forests. An estimated 160 species of terrestrial animals are believed to inhabit the site during at least a portion of the year. Roosevelt Elk, Marbled Murrelet, and Spotted Owls are amongst the species that use the area. Through analysis it was determined that, due to stream gradients and downstream fish blockages, no fish species live in the tributaries located in the planning area.

In regards to the Roosevelt Elk, this plan recognizes the importance of migration corridors between the Sequim prairie, which is not DNR held, and areas used for forage and calving. Historically the calving areas were located in both the Caraco and Canyon Creek drainages which are on USFS lands on the west side of the Dungeness River. Cooperative efforts to increase forage opportunities have occurred in the Caraco Creek area and in several areas on Burnt Hill. This plan incorporates migration corridors through the DNR lands of Burnt Hill for access between the Sequim prairie and the calving and forage areas. The migration corridors on DNR land are primarily along the Johnson Creek riparian areas, which naturally lend themselves to this function. These riparian areas are being conserved as provided by DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan. In addition to the conservation of these corridors, with volunteer efforts the meadows located on the south slopes of Burnt Hill can continue to provide forage opportunities.

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Public Involvement

Summary of Methods Used

A public meeting was held October 27, 1999, seeking information about existing public uses of these lands and to discuss how to find appropriate balance among various interests, including alternative ways to manage compatible recreation use. The initial known issues included garbage dumping, neighbor concerns, ORV use, and elk habitat needs. DNR's first task, however, was to identify what uses were occurring on Burnt Hill and identify the associated impacts.

The outreach process had three main components: public meetings with newspaper notices, a formal public survey, and a visitor/citizens focus group. Public outreach and focus group meeting dates are found in Appendix C.

Public Meetings

A public meeting was held at Carrie Blake Park Center, Sequim, on October 27, 1999, to initiate the Burnt Hill public involvement process. A fourteen-member Burnt Hill Focus Group was formed from the sign-up sheet and interest that came out of this meeting, which was attended by approximately 200 people.

An Open House was held February 7, 2001, at Carrie Blake Park Center, Sequim, and was attended by approximately 100 people. The purpose of the open house was to review a list of recommendations drafted by the Burnt Hill Focus Group for DNR to consider in the future management of the area. Peninsula Community College, Clallam County Noxious Weed Board, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife provided displays relevant to the focus group's work. Each of these groups provided technical support to the focus group.

On October 20, 2004, at a meeting sponsored by several neighbors in Carrie Blake Park, a presentation was provided by DNR and was followed by a question and answer session. The purpose of the meeting was to update neighbors on where the plan and planning process were at that point in time as well as to hear concerns and answer questions. The neighbors attending this meeting were reminded of which neighbors were on the focus group, were encouraged to attend the focus group work sessions as observers, and asked to give their ongoing ideas to the focus group members who represent neighbor interests.

Survey

DNR contracted with Peninsula College in November 1999 to conduct a recreational use survey for the Burnt Hill block. The college survey was started in January 2000 under the direction of Dr. Mike Sims. Seven hundred and ten surveys were mailed out. Forty percent of the mailing list consisted of residents or property owners living within two miles of Burnt Hill. The remainder of the list was composed of residents of the City of Sequim, residents from the eastern side of Port Angeles, and a random selection of names from various recreation organizations. Thirty-five percent of the college survey forms were returned, which is considered an extremely high rate of return for mail-out surveys. Peninsula College issued its independent report of the survey

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findings in June 2000.

The college survey addressed several areas, including the following: visitor activities; distribution and frequency of visits; length and days of stay; trails and roads use; organized events; perceived status of the area; garbage dumping; conflicts between trail use, property owners, and environment; condition and adequacy of trails; improvement concerns; environmental concerns; problems observed by survey respondents; services desired; trail preferences; demographic information; and other activities respondents participate in within the counties. Results highlighted in the report are shown below.

- Most evident problem: Garbage dumping.
- Conflict between visitors: Potential conflict between motorized and non-motorized was suggested.
- Most requested services: Trail marking, with a willingness to help maintain trail markers.

During the February 7, 2001 Open House, DNR shared with the public the findings of this survey.

Focus Group

The Burnt Hill Focus Group was formed in November 1999. The group has been determined to see the project through, and has been willing to work with DNR on planning, and to negotiate their respective roles in the upcoming phases.

The Burnt Hill Focus Group is a diverse group made up of representatives of relevant types of recreation interests, neighbors, and wildlife management. There was one person from each recreation group and five citizens-at-large in the original focus group, as well as representation from a neighboring timber company, a group focused on elk habitat, and governmental bodies other than DNR. The original Burnt Hill Focus Group members included: Backcountry Horsemen of Washington, Inc., Olympic Peninsula Chapter; Olympic Peninsula Motorcycle Club; Peninsula Trails Coalition (hikers); Olympic Peninsula Bicyclists; Just Jeep Junkies; Olympic Trailblazers (4-wheel drive); Dungeness Elk Advisory Committee; citizens-at-large (neighbors); citizens-at-large (hikers); citizens-at-large (motorcycles); Merrill & Ring Timber Company (neighbors); Clallam County; U.S. Forest Service; Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Clallam County Noxious Weed Board; and the City of Sequim.

As often happens with planning efforts that take place over time, those who chose to participate continuously were those who felt most invested in the outcome of the work immediately at hand. For example, those interested in wildlife habitat were very involved when the group was identifying and evaluating habitat on Burnt Hill, and considering how that information could and/or should influence the eventual trail plan. Once that work was completed, these interests knew that the more recent trail selection work would use their earlier input, and they were kept on the mailing list so they could track the progress of the work.

The focus group members who continued actively working throughout the process included two

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of the citizens-at-large representing neighbor interests, one representing motorcycle interests, and one representative each from the Backcountry Horsemen, Olympic Peninsula Bicyclists, and Just Jeep Junkies. In the end, representation on the focus group remained broad, and when special insight was needed from those whose participation had lapsed, DNR sought out their input.

The focus group meetings provided a forum for understanding the various interests in Burnt Hill, and the nature of each group's needs and concerns. Portions of the meetings were work sessions where sub-group work was presented, such as each group presenting its trail preferences and priorities. In addition, meetings included time to review all the work, and identify what the group could agree on as a whole, relative to what had been seen and learned on site visits and from presentations up to that time. While conducted as work sessions with specific working agendas, the focus group meetings have also been open meetings for the public to attend and observe. Overall, the focus group found a level of respect for each other and has been willing to listen to the different points of view brought to the table.

The focus group has provided substantial and meaningful input into the development of this plan. Summaries of key focus group recommendations are in Appendix D.

Priorities Outlined

Several priorities have been identified. These include the following: designating and managing trail facilities to DNR standards, formalizing parking areas to accommodate existing use levels, accommodating existing motorized and non-motorized use types, providing signage, providing education and enforcement to address issues such as safety, noise, the protection of natural and ecological resources, etc., providing training for volunteers to address issues such as DNR maintenance standards, safety, etc., developing management partnerships with County Sheriffs, etc., and being mindful of neighbor concerns. Objectives and strategies addressing these priorities are covered in Part II, and the Recreational Facility Plan in Part III also supports these priorities.